

In the Shadows of Dreams

by Mathais

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Summary: Akihiko and Minato can only meet in their dreams, but for now, it's enough. Akihiko/Minato, Post-P3.

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Disclaimer: I don't own the characters/elements of the Persona franchise; I'm just here to play.

Notes: You will pry the name Minato from my cold, dead hands. I don't have half as much an attachment to Souji as Minato. I've been working on this for a while now, and I'm still not entirely happy with it, but I hope you enjoy.

\*\*OoOoO\*\*

The air rent before his fists. One punch became two became four became eight. His body flowed forward, a never-ending rush of blows. Muscles bunched and then released explosively, casting a faint sheen of sweat across his skin. The wind sang through the trees. It blew

leaves off the greenery, which drifted lazily across the sunny skies and tangled with his cape as it whipped about.

Akihiko never felt more at peace than he did now, the calm of practice mixing with pleasant weather to lull him into a meditative state. If he had to envision a perfect day, it'd be just like now. Nice weather, an open field, and the burn of practice in his skin.

"I'll never get tired of seeing you like this."

Akihiko didn't let that voice interrupt him despite now knowing that this was a dream. He followed through with his final punch and let all of his tension flow out with it before he dropped his hands to his side. He then turned to a sight that sent a bolt of heat into his heart.

Minato smiled down at him from his position nested in the branches of a tree. He reclined languidly, looking for all the world like he belonged there. Akihiko could only stare. A small smile split his face before evolving into a full blown laugh. "Oh wow. I hope you know you look ridiculous up there."

Minato's face drew into a vaguely offended pout. "What's wrong with it?"

"You're a city boy through and through. Do you even know how to climb a tree?"

Minato's mouth opened to counter before he took a look down, shut that very same mouth, and appeared to ponder his situation. "You may be right," he admitted. "Help me down?"

Akihiko drew close to the base of the tree, hands on his hips and eyes still laughing. He shook his head at the mirth curling in his stomach and held his hands out. Without a moment's hesitation, Minato dropped down into them. A small step back let him balance properly, after which Minato was solid and secure in his arms.

"You're getting better at this," Minato said.

"And you're more playful than ever," Akihiko shot back.

"...too much?"

"A little."

Minato huffed a quiet laugh. "You know how I dream of the way things could have gone, right?"

"Yeah." Akihiko was well aware of Minato's dreams, how he dreamt of that last year and all the things that could have happened. It was always interesting hearing about the different things he discovered each time.

"I dreamed something different this time around. It was interesting."

"Oh, how so?" he asked as he settled the two of them down, back against the tree and warm body in his arms. As long as Minato wasn't

complaining, he was going to take advantage of the situation.

"Mhm, I dreamt I was a girl."

Akihiko choked on air. "What?"

"Well, I didn't think it was weird at the time, but it was an interesting experience. Gave me a new perspective on things."

"Oh?"

"Not sure I want to do it again though," he admitted. "I like being a guy."

Akihiko laughed. "Yeah, well, no arguments there."

"It was different though. I was different. I got to try things differently than most." He twisted in Akihiko's lap, a very tiny grin on his lips. "You were just as adorable when I was a girl."

Akihiko sputtered. "Wait, you still...?"

"It may have been a dream, but in a way, I was still me." Minato shrugged and then pushed himself closer to him, head bumping the side of Akihiko's cheek. "As long as I'm still me, I'll be interested in you."

"You're embarrassing, I hope you know."

"I'm well aware of it." Minato said with a touch of a grin at the edge of his mouth.

The two of them settled in some more, and Akihiko simply breathed. He didn't know how he got such a blessing, this chance to see Minato again despite what happened at his graduation, but he never once took it for granted. He never told anyone about these dreams he's had for the last few years, too afraid of them disappearing, but cherished them all the same.

He didn't get this second chance with anyone else, not Miki or Shinji. There were so many regrets, even as he turned their deaths into strength.

That he could sit here, even in this world in his dreams, breeze across his skin and Minato next to him, was a miracle in itself.

"Well, what about you? Anything interesting?" Minato finally asked.

"We met another group of Persona users from a small town called Inaba. Got captured. Saved the world again."

"You're remarkably blasÃ© about this."

"It was just a very busy couple of days," Akihiko said as he scratched the back of his head. "I'm kind of pissed with myself at how I got captured, but we did end up meeting some good kids."

"'Kids?' Were they in primary school?"

"Well no, they were in high school..."

Minato snickered. "Then they're not that much younger than you! I wouldn't call them kids."

"Well, we were kids too when all this began." Akihiko slid down against the tree, dragging Minato with him. Minato slipped until his head was at his chest, and Akihiko readjusted his arms appropriately. "Oh yeah, there was a guy there that reminded me of you."

"How so?"

"He's a Wild Card too, and leader of the group. He's pretty strong and cool headed, but he's also kind of deadpan. He wields a long sword that he uses both one-handed and two-handed. His main Persona's lightning based, and he's fast too, good at both short and long range. Ah, I kind of wish I could've fought him! We would've had a glorious battle."

"Falling for him, hm? Is that your kink, Wild Cards?" Minato teased.

"H-hey, what? T-that's-" Akihiko sputtered.

"I can feel your heart, y'know." Minato twisted so he was face to face with him. Even after all this time, Minato's hand on his chest managed to take his breath away. He was completely aware of the warmth seeping into him, and it was still oh so good.

"Well yeah," Akihiko rallied. "I do find strength attractive, but he's not you."

Minato paused, a quirky half-smile sitting awkwardly on his face. Akihiko tensed again, though he knew Minato could feel that stress. Before Minato could chase the expression off his face, Akihiko asked, "What's wrong? And don't give me any of that 'nothing' crap."

Minato's features schooled visibly, and he went back to hiding behind his fringes. Akihiko had no doubt that he would've retreated behind his earphones if he'd had them, but here and now, Akihiko had him at his mercy. It may have been difficult for both of them, but he tilted Minato's chin up so that they were again eye to eye. He held them there for as long as he needed to.

Something shifted in that gaze, and then Minato began to speak.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm holding you back. You still get to go forward. You get to grow. I've seen how you've changed over the years. Me? I'm stuck living the same time over and over again, dreaming of what-ifs and could-have-beens."

"Minato..." Akihiko didn't know what to say to the bitterness hidden beneath the wistfulness in his tone. Of course, he knew about what Minato did between these moments they had together. A moment passed before he could ask, "Do you regret it?"

"...if I start to regret it, Erebus wins." Akihiko's face drew into a pinched look, which spurred Minato into speaking more. "That's not the question you asked though. No, I don't regret it. Even now, even in all of these dreams of mine, I've never chosen differently. I'll always choose to protect everyone... choose to protect you."

"How can you say that with a straight face?" Akihiko asked.

"Because it's the truth," Minato said even though a faint tint of red cast across his nose. "Being able to remember that conviction though, that's difficult. Even now, I still don't know how much I'm allowed to change before the Seal can't do its job anymore. I remember what I wanted when I stood up to Nyx. I'm trying to etch my will onto the divine for as long as I can, and that always has a price."

Akihiko could feel the way Minato's heart thudded in his chest. For all that Minato could control his expressions, his heart always betrayed him, and Akihiko found it amazing, even now, that Minato let him close enough to tell. Time had turned Minato into an almost mythical presence for the former SEES members, but here and now, Akihiko was all too reminded that Minato was human.

Human and oh so young for someone who sacrificed himself to ensure humanity's continuance.

His arms tightened as he pressed Minato against his chest. He knew that Minato could tell how his own heart raced, but it was important that he knew.

"Y'know, Minato? I think you and your Seal are stronger than you think."

Minato stiffened, but Akihiko didn't relent.

"When you made the Seal, you took the bonds you had with us and converted it into power. I don't think they've faded at all, and they wouldn't be much use anyway if they snapped just because we grew as people." Minato's breaths sped slightly, and Akihiko's hands began massaging his back, but he didn't stop. "I think you're allowed to live how you can, even here. The Seal can take it. We're doing our best out there to ease the burden on the Seal. And if you're worried about me, well..."

Akihiko drew back so that he was now eye to eye with Minato. Minato was trembling faintly, but so were the hands that held his shoulders. The only thing steady about them was their eyes, with which they gazed at each other as if nothing else existed.

"I promise you this, Minato. In the future, if I ever decide to move on, I'll tell you first and we'll discuss it then. But know this too: I love you, Minato. I love you, and I'll never stop loving you." Akihiko paused, his deep blush offset by the glint in his eyes. "You, you're not a burden. You don't hold me back. You've never held me back."

"Akihiko..."

"Can't that be enough for now?"

Minato kissed him. It wasn't the shy, hesitant pecks Minato stole from him back when they first started dating. No, this was the kind of kiss that left Akihiko's fingers scrabbling for purchase on his back. It was the kind of kiss that burned from head to toe and stole his breath away.

It was also the kind of kiss that Akihiko remembered receiving one clear day on the roof of his school.

When Minato drew back, it was only just enough to see each other. Akihiko could feel Minato's racing pulse and harsh panting on his flushed skin, and his response was to tighten his arms once more.

"...I'm sorry, Akihiko. Yes, I do think that it's enough. It's things like this that remind me of how much I love you."

"I love you too, even if you can be an idiot."

"Then let us enjoy what we have now," Minato said. Akihiko was acutely aware of the hand now kneading his exposed chest, and the other that slipped beneath his mantle to dance along his back. His own were doing the same, funneling their way into Minato's school blazer.

"Yes, let's."

Akihiko dragged Minato down to him, and they enjoyed what time they had with each other before they had to return to their separate worlds.

End  
file.